THE COMIC BOOK LEGAL DEFENSE FUND

defending First Amendment rights in the comics community

NOVEMBER 1998
volume 2
#3

BUSTED!©

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE COMIC BOOK LEGAL DEFENSE FUND

WILDCATS

JOIN THE STRUGGLE FOR LIBERTY

The Comic Book Legal Defense Fund

is a non-profit organization protecting the First Amendment rights of the comics community. Founded in 1986, the CBLDF's guiding principle is that comics deserve the same freedom of expression afforded film, literature, and other media. Thanks to generous support from comics fans and professionals alike, the CBLDF has coordinated and funded the legal defense of more than a dozen First Amendment cases.

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Busted! is a quarterly newsletter mailed directly to those interested in preserving First Amendment rights. Our goal is to keep interested individuals informed of current events and exhibitions.

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A Word from the Director

The CBLDF was founded to defend the First Amendment rights of the entire comics community, including artists, publishers, and even readers. However, from the very start, the bulk of our work has centered on comics retailers.

Comic books may no longer be a truly mass medium in the way they were forty years ago, but the art of the comic has never been healthier. As a medium, comics are branching out to embrace all manner of genres, and, as the art of comics continues to evolve, today's comic books look less and less like what most people remember from their youth. That simple fact accounts for the vast majority of our work. More often than not, the CBLDF is in the position of defending comics from the approbation of people who haven't read a comic book in twenty years or more.

Within the comics community, it is retailers who bear the brunt of assaults on comics as an artform. Comic shops comprise the "front lines" of our particular fight against censorship, which is essentially a local phenomenon. That's why one of our main priorities at the Fund today is helping retailers understand their First Amendment rights and protect themselves from the sort of harassment that can swiftly snowball into a court fight. The CBLDF will gladly undertake the legal defense of a retailer under assault, but we're happier still if we can help keep retailers out of the courts in the first place.

With that in mind, we were pleased that CBLDF general counsel Burton Joseph was able to address the Professional Association of Comic Entertainment Retailers (PACER) at their annual trade show in St. Louis, which you can read about in this newsletter. I'm also excited by the progress on Retailer Resources, a practical guide to censorship issues we're developing with the help of other First Amendment groups, including the American Booksellers Association's Foundation for Free Expression and the Freedom to Read Foundation of the American Library Association. Retailer Resources will debut August 1999 at the Retailer Expo at ComiCon International in San Diego, the United States' largest gathering of comic book professionals. If you own, manage, or work in a comic shop, I hope we'll see you there.

Chris Oarr, Executive Director

Jonah Hex: Case Closed!

Lansdale and Truman Ride Free as Judge Shoots Down Winters' Lawsuit

The 1996 lawsuit against DC Comics/Time-Warner and *Jonah Hex* creative team **Joe R. Lansdale**, **Timothy Truman**, and **Sam Glanzman** has been dismissed from the Los Angeles County Superior Court. Filed by blues musicians **Johnny** and **Edgar Winter**, the suit claimed multiple accounts of defamation, invasion of privacy, and emotional distress stemming from the depiction of two characters called the "Autumn Brothers" in DC's *Jonah Hex* mini-series, *Riders of the Worm and Such*.

"It was our intent," said Lansdale, "to use the *Jonah Hex* series as a vehicle for satire and parody of musical genres . . . as well as old radio shows, movie serials and the like. We feel it's within our rights to parody music, stage and album personas, lyrics, and public figures."

The defense was provided by attorneys Gail Migdal Title and Jeffrey Abrams and funded by DC Comics/Time-Warner. "This suit," stated Title, "sought to invade the right of artists and writers to free creative expression, a right protected by the First Amendment, parody and other laws."

Judge Ronald Cappai eventually dismissed all nine charges filed by the Winter Brothers. "It's a victory not only for us," said Truman, "but for every cartoonist. As artists, we must have the right to comment on the legacies of other artists—no matter the format, no matter the medium, no matter how outrageous."

The members of the *Jonah Hex* team are grateful for the role the CBLDF played in bringing the case to the attention of the comics community. Original artwork from a new Lansdale and Truman story in the upcoming *Murder by Crowquill* anthology will be auctioned on-line at **http://www.comicon.com**. All proceeds from the sale will benefit the CBLDF.

FIGHTING THE CODE:
FORGOTTEN HEROES OF THE '50s

Wertham. Kefauver. Gaines. For many, these names conjure up the tragic but true history of the comic book witch-hunts of the 1950s. But what about Adams, Katzev, Siegel? Fighting back against anti-comics hysteria and legislation, these are men who left the comics industry a proud legal history.

New York Senator Robert C. Hendrickson gave the opening speech of the 1954 U.S. Senate hearings on comic books and juvenile delinquency. "I wish to state emphatically that freedom of the press is not at issue in this investigation," he began. "The members of this Senate subcommittee are fully aware of the long, hard, bitter fight that has been waged to achieve and preserve the freedom of the press, as well as the other freedoms in our Bill of Rights which we cherish in America . . . we are not a subcommittee of blue-nosed censors."

Whatever Hendrickson's noble words, the Senate hearings inspired a rash of state and local anti-comics laws that would have pleased the bluest-nosed censor among them. Long overlooked following the adoption of the Comics Code, the wave of anti-comics legislation in the mid-50s not only hindered the sale of comics, but in some areas, outlawed it altogether.

By the late 1950's, nearly every state had legislation regulating or banning the sale of comic books. Drawing upon a "model statute" crafted by the 1957 Council of State Governors, many states, cities, counties, and towns adopted anti-crime and horror comic statutes to suit their own local needs.

One such statute required a license to sell comics. Another created a rule of evidence stating that all comics were unquestionably aimed at children. Most statutes criminalized the possession of certain comics hand-in-hand with specific exemptions for newspapers.

These laws were often grossly unconstitutional, violating the federal guarantees of a free press, equal protection under the law, and in some cases, even the right to trial by jury. Many of these laws only lasted a year, invalidated by judicial scrutiny of what they banned, and how they banned it.

But laws are not invalidated unless challenged in court. In a heated public climate, in communities that believed that comics created criminals, it was a dangerous thing for a business owner to stand up for his rights. Yet throughout the latter half of the '50s, many courageous comic book retailers found themselves doing just that.

In 1958, a coalition of comics retailers and distributors led by Jay Adams took on the State Legislature of Washington, fighting a law requiring licenses for anyone who sold comics. The tradition of "licensing" was an old form of censorship with its roots in seventeenth century England; abolishing unfair licensing procedures was one of the very reasons the First Amendment was adopted.

"We have here a prior restraint in the most unrestricted form," wrote the Judge, deciding for the retailers. "It is a licensing act in the seventeenth century mold and is void on its face." This opinion, *Jay Adams v. Van R. Hinkle,* was cited the next year in a case coming out of Los Angeles County.

In *Katzev v. County of Los Angeles,* retailers challenged legislation outlawing crime comics that depicted fictional acts of crime. The ordinance was struck down for being "over-broad," since it "drew an irrational line between all true accounts of crime, even though disgustingly portrayed, and all fictional accounts of crime." In an unusual display of comic book savvy, the Judge in the case noted that "no valid reason has been presented why comic books dealing in a disgustingly detailed way with the exploits of Murder Incorporated, John Dillinger, or Jesse James will have any less effect on children than *Popeye, Tom Mix,* or fictionalized accounts of the activities of law enforcement officials like *G-Men.*"

Police Commissioner of Baltimore v. Siegel Enterprises, Inc., confirmed that publication, distribution, and sales were all important parts of the free press, even if that press was entertainment-oriented. To impede one was to interrupt the business of the other, and thus a violation of the First Amendment.

This statement is a crucial one that still protects the comics and publishing world today. Distributors and retailers are on the front lines of the struggle for free speech, but it's a struggle that affects creators, publishers, and readers as well.

Adams, Katzev, and Siegel realized this, and fought for their rights as business owners and American citizens. The cases they won for themselves and for the industry are vital for the continued defense of comics today. It is only through such legal battles in court that our right to free speech can be protected.

For more information about these and other important cases in the history of comics and censorship, be sure to visit out web-site at **www.cbldf.org**.

www.cbldf.org
AUTUMN UPDATES

The new and always improving CBLDF Web-Site is your source for comprehensive information about censorship issues in comics. Designed by volunteer web-guru Eric Griffith, the site features up-to-the-minute convention news, case information, and many new on-line programs and events:

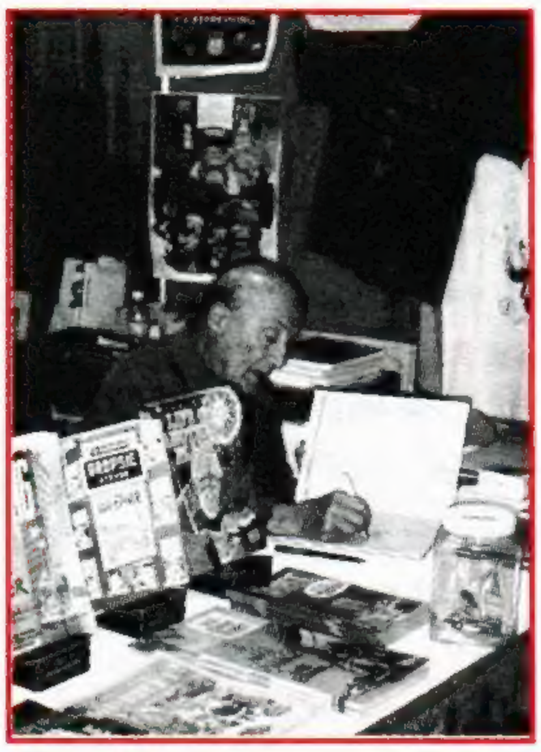
- **ON-LINE CATALOG:** features our complete line of donation premiums, including CBLDF T-shirts, comics, posters, prints, and a host of other cool stuff. We'll ship you whichever premium you select as our way of saying thanks for your donation.
- **ARCHIVES:** Our interactive timeline will put the whole history of comics censorship at your fingertips, from the 1890's to the present. The on-line archives also include detailed case files, a complete history of the CBLDF, and a comprehensive bibliography.
- **CONVENTION REPORTS:** Find out when the Fund will be coming to a town near you. We preview the upcoming cons, and review the ones we've been to. Our detailed reports will help you feel like you were at the con even if you couldn't be!
- **WEB-MASTERS:** Show your support of the Fund with a CBLDF Ad Banner. They're available for easy download in several varieties. Let your visitors know about upcoming events and tell them "This site is protected by the Comic Book Legal Defense Fund!"

LET'S JUNK CENSORSHIP!

Looking to get rid of an old or broken-down car? The CBLDF can help. In fact, we can turn that bucket of bolts into valuable ammunition in the fight against censorship.

Just call Joff Enterprises at **1-877-CARS 4 US (227-7487)** and ask for ext. 1015. They'll send a tow truck to remove the car, sell it, and forward all the funds to the CBLDF. Even a car that hasn't run in years has salvage value, and it costs absolutely nothing to participate. All it takes from you is a phone call.

CONVENTION



WILL EISNER

Comic conventions provide a unique opportunity for the CBLDF to reach all aspects of the comics industry: fans, retailers, creators, publishers, and more. They're valuable not simply as fundraisers, but as forums for raising awareness of First Amendment issues affecting everyone interested in the comics medium.

The second half of 1998 saw the Fund on the convention trail more than ever before, and not just at the big comic shows. We were to able to attend science-fiction and fantasy cons, book expos, and gaming conventions, as well as a growing number of regional comic events. Wherever we traveled, show organizers donated booth space and gave us a warm welcome.

Last issue's con coverage ended right before **Wizard World** (July 17-19), certainly one of the country's biggest shows. It was also the scene of one of the biggest raffles in Fund history. The prize—Han Solo, frozen in carbonite for your carrying convenience. Fans flocked to the booth for a chance to win this life-size reproduction, donated by Jim Mortenson of Comix Revolution. And who better to convey the prize on winner S. James than Jeremy Bullock, the man behind the mask of Boba Fett? Together with some all-star signings by Mark Waid and Matt Wagner, the show raised almost $6,500.

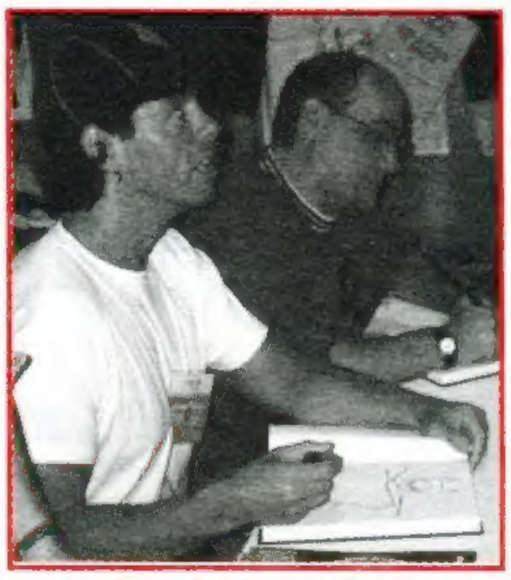
That same weekend, another crack CBLDF crew headed to **RuneCon** in New Britain, CT, a show devoted to gaming. It was our first real role-playing crowd, but it proved that where there's gamers, there's sure to be comics fans. We received a warm reception and look forward to attending next year.

MARK WAID

At the **San Diego ComiCon International** (August 11-16), the Fund asked the largest gathering in comics to show us the money. And they did, in a huge show of support from fans and professionals alike. We'd like to thank the diverse line-up of creators who leant their time and talents signing and sketching at our booth—from alterna-stars Dan Clowes, Los Bros Hernandez, James Kochalka, John Mueller, Ivan Brunetti, Bob Fingerman, and Eddie Campbell, to fan faves Jeph Loeb, Tim Sale, Mark Waid, and Mark Schultz, to the father of the graphic novel himself, Will Eisner. All these artists helped make San Diego '98 our most successful ever.

But what really put us over the top was the marathon signing by the new *Wildcats* creative team—Scott Lobdell, Richard Friend, Alex Sinclair, and Travis Charest, one of the most ornate renderers in comics today. Fans flocked for signatures and Charest sketches, pulled in by Lobdell and ace WildStorm marketeer Anthony Bozzi's top-of-the-lungs rendition of the "Meow Mix" song. Serious *Wildcats* fan Glen Brown was particularly impressed with the team's stamina and good will. "I've never seen Travis sit this long at a show and sketch before!" he said. "He must really believe in the cause."

Graphitti Designs, Oni Press, and View Askew also teamed up at San Diego in support of the Fund, donating $5,000 from the sales of their limited-edition Jay and Silent Bob action figures. The con climaxed with the Sixth Annual CBLDF Boozeathon/Fundraiser/Schmoozefest, organized by *Kultur Magazine* impresario Rex Edhlund. Sponsored by *Kultur*, Fantagraphics Books, and Last Gasp, the benefit bash was the week's swingingest scene. Sighted at the shindig: the funny one from *Suddenly Susan*, and Robert Williams, who also provided artwork for the posters and tickets. Altogether, we raised more than $18,000, a tremendous show of solidarity from the entire comics industry.



TIM SALE AND JEPH LOEB

DENIS KITCHEN AND HARLAN ELLISON

HARLAN ELLISON RECEIVES 1998 DEFENDER OF LIBERTY AWARD

Renowned author and critic **Harlan Ellison** has been honored with the 1998 **Defender of Liberty Award**. This annual CBLDF award recognizes outstanding efforts to promote free speech in the comics community. The award was presented by CBLDF president **Denis Kitchen** on September 4 at **DragonCon** in Atlanta, GA, where Ellison was the guest of honor.

Ellison has been called "one of the greatest living American short story writers" by *The Washington Post*. In a career spanning more than forty years, Ellison has written more than 45 books and some 1300 stories, as well as numerous essays, articles, newspaper columns, comic books, and three dozen screen and teleplays.

As an artist and critic, Ellison has always been a more-than-outspoken proponent of free speech. "The self-anointed arbiters of what is permissible for us to see, or read, or think are always with us," said Ellison at the award ceremony. "They are the shambling Legion of the Intellectually Undead. They count themselves the spokespersons for 'the Majority.' Well, as Mark Twain once correctly observed, 'whenever you find that you are on the side of the majority, it is time to reform.' They are always with us, and we have to stand on a high place and keep watching for them."

Ellison's column in the *L.A. Weekly*, "An Edge in My Voice" provides a regular forum for his impassioned defense of the First Amendment. In 1990, his continuing commitment to artistic freedom earned him the Silver Pen for Journalism from P.E.N., the international writer's union. Ellison is an equally eloquent spokesman for the comics medium. His own comic, *Harlan Ellison's Dream Corridor*, garnered numerous awards and such rave reviews that Dark Horse re-launched the series in bookstore format as *Harlan Ellison's Dream Corridor Quarterly*.

Ellison has consistently been one of the Comic Book Legal Defense Fund's strongest supporters. In addition to regular monetary contributions, Ellison has a policy of only writing book introductions if payment is made directly to the Fund. He also convened a special panel on censorship in comics at Mad Media V in Madison, WI, where he was joined by **Neil Gaiman**, **Peter David**, and **Mike Baron**.

DragonCon hosted a special award ceremony for the presentation of the Defender of Liberty. "Throughout the years," said Kitchen presenting the award, "countless people have quietly supported the CBLDF and its efforts. Harlan Ellison is *not* one of those quiet supporters. He has been an outspoken proponent of First Amendment rights throughout his entire career. He's been a great ambassador for the comics industry. He's helped raise our public profile, and he's extolled comics as a worthwhile form of literature. I'm delighted to be presenting him with this year's Defender of Liberty Award."

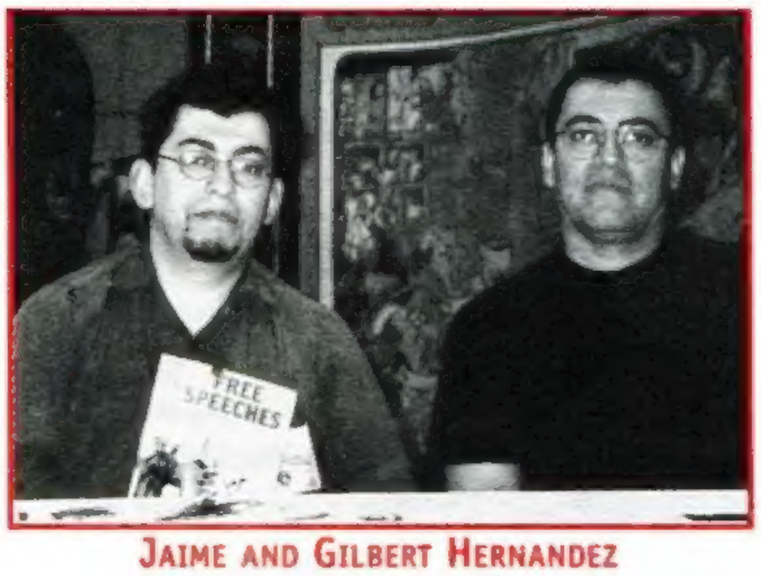
Previous Defender of Liberty honorees include **Dave Sim**, **Paul Mavrides**, and **Neil Gaiman**. The award statuette was designed by sculptor **Randy Bowen**. The 1999 Defender of Liberty Award will be hosted by the **Pittsburgh ComiCon** and will take place on April 24, 1999.

REPORT

Atlanta's **DragonCon** (September 3-6) hosted this year's Defender of Liberty Award, bestowed by the CBLDF upon author Harlan Ellison (see below). Ellison whipped the crowd into a frenzy of support, nearly doubling the amount we raised at last year's show. Liberty was upheld to the tune of more than $5,000, proving that you don't have to explain the importance of the First Amendment to the sci-fi/fantasy community—they get it.

Madison's **Mad Media V** (September 25-27) offered another opportunity to watch this year's Defender of Liberty in action. Ellison convened a special panel on comics and censorship, moderating a discussion which included Neil Gaiman, Peter David, and Mike Baron. Ellison proved himself a natural auctioneer at the CBLDF charity auction, offering up unpublished manuscripts and tours of his own house! Bringing in more than $5,000, the show was another sci-fi success.

That same weekend, Bethesda, MD hosted another record-breaking **Small Press Expo** (SPX). CBLDF board member Frank Miller put in a surprise appearance, which turned into a marathon signing at the booth. Organized explicitly to benefit the Fund, SPX '98 raised more than $6,500, a remarkable achievement.



JAIME AND GILBERT HERNANDEZ

JAMES KOCHALKA AND DAN CLOWES

Next year, SPX and the International Comics and Animation Festival (ICAF) will be joined by the Professional Association of Comic Entertaiment Retailers (PACER), for a comprehensive comics summit.

The CBLDF headed to Florida for **TropiCon XVII** (November 13-15), another sci-fi/fantasy show with an affection for comics and for the Fund. At guest of honor Neil Gaiman's suggestion, the con adopted the CBLDF as its official charity. "Comics, sci-fi, fantasy, Florida . . . in November! Now that's a winning combination," said CBLDF point-man Chris Oarr. With assistance from Gaiman and Charles Vess, the Fund raised more than $1,200.

And finally, we were grateful to spend Thanksgiving weekend at **Mid-Ohio Con**. Traditionally run by a crew of crack volunteers, this year was the Fund's first in-person Mid-Ohio appearance. Roger Price of RAP Productions spun us some limited-edition *Spiderman* shirts to complement a signing by new Spidey-slinger John Byrne. Byrne also barked the famous Mid-Ohio charity auction, helping us bring in more than $5,000.

Thanks again to all the show organizers, promoters, professionals and fans who helped out the cause. Stay tuned to our next issue for a complete preview of the 1999 convention season, or visit our convention headquarters on-line at **www.cbldf.org**.

LOOK FOR THE FUND AT A COMIC CON NEAR YOU!

FEBRUARY 19-21
Portland Comicon, Portland OR

FEBRUARY 26-28
A.P.E. VI, San Jose CA

MARCH 5-7
Megacon, Orlando FL
Chicago Comic Fest, Chicago IL

MARCH 19-20
Big Apple Con, New York NY

MARCH 25-28
AggieCon, College Station TX

APRIL 9-11
ICON, Stony Brook NY
5-Con, Northampton MA

APRIL 11
A.C.M.E., Newark DE

APRIL 16-18
Wondercon, San Fransisco CA

APRIL 23-25
Pittsburgh Comicon, Pittsburgh PA
Home of the 1999 Defender of Liberty Award

MAY 14-16
Motor City Comic Con, Novi MI

MAY 22
Ramapo Comicon, Ramapo NY

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON THESE SHOWS, CHECK THE CBLDF CONVENTION GUIDE AT www.cbldf.org, OR CALL US AT 1-800-99-CBLDF.

CBLDF Legal Cousel Burton Joseph Speaks at PACER

The Professional Association of Comic Entertainment Professionals (PACER) held its annual trade show at the Regal Riverfront October 2-4 in St. Louis, Missouri. Representing the CBLDF was executive director Chris Oarr and general counsel Burton Joseph, who delivered Saturday's keynote address. The focus of his talk was on current trends in "harmful to minors" legislation, the newest front in the fight against censorship.

Joseph began his lecture with a short history of the First Amendment, reminding the audience that freedom of speech was a "radical concept" when the Bill of Rights was written. Free expression is "that right from which all other rights emerge," because it guarantees our democracy a free, unfettered marketplace of ideas. With that freedom, through the competition of ideas, the framers believed that the very best ideas—whether in science, politics, or art—will rise to the top.

Even so, there is one category of speech that the First Amendment does not protect: obscenity. The obscenity exemption is based on the notion that there are some forms of expression so indecent that they may actually incite depravity. Under the Hickland test, a product of nineteenth century British common law, the measure of obscenity was whether a work would have a tendency to deprave the weakest minds, i.e., children. Thus, what was suitable for children determined the broadest parameters of public discourse.

Obscenity means something very different today. For something to be considered obscene it must as a whole be completely lacking in literary, artistic, political, or social value, and that makes obscenity tough to prosecute. This is especially true since most Americans consider what individual adults read or look at a private matter. However, American jurisprudence has always allowed a different, lower standard of obscenity for children. Certain restrictions on material that is "harmful to minors" have been held as constitutional.

What we see happening today is a new sort of censorship taking place, where those who would restrict public discourse are using new harmful to minors laws to circumvent the Constitution. For instance, in Alabama a law recently was passed that establishes severe restrictions on the display of material which might potentially be harmful to minors; the chilling effect of this law is that bookstores may not be allowed to carry books containing nude photographs or even adult language except in special viewing rooms. While Alabama is the first state to pass such a law, similar bills were entered in 38 other state legislatures last year. This trend threatens to bring us back full circle to the Hickland Test and a time when our public discourse is defined by what is acceptable to children.

Joseph closed his talk by noting that, historically, censorship is always focused on media that challenges traditional communication that the mainstream has grown to understand, and that comics, like rap music today or rock and roll fifty years ago, has always been on the front lines of the fight for free expression.

New Wildcats Team Joins Struggle For Liberty

For the CBLDF, this year's San Diego ComiCon was a wonderful show of support from the entire industry. The hometown crew, San Diego's own **WildStorm Studios** was particularly generous, giving us a tour of their studios, donating hundreds of dollars worth of rare comics, and providing us with an all-star signing line-up—writer **Scott Lobdell**, penciler **Travis Charest**, and inker **Richard Friend**, the creative team for the new re-launch of ***Wildcats***, along with award-winning WildStorm colorist **Alex Sinclair**.

WildStorm and the CBLDF first came together thanks to **Jim Mugno**, owner of Dreamscape Comics in Orange, CA. Mugno approached WildStorm's **Anthony Bozzi** in July about having Charest sign at his store. "Jim wanted to do something special," said Bozzi, "a new charity piece that would benefit the CBLDF. I talked to **Rachelle Brissenden**, the editor of *Wildcats*, and she was very gung-ho. She worked really hard to make it all happen, and she stressed the importance of the event to the creative team. We ended up with a limited-edition lithograph, which was signed at Dreamscape by Travis, Rich, and Alex."

The signing was a success, and paved the way for a repeat performance at San Diego. A new run of lithos was produced, this time to be signed by all four creators. A few days prior to the signing, Bozzi and Brissenden arranged for us to have an informal, after-hours discussion with Lobdell, Charest, Friend, and Sinclair about the comics medium, the new book, and the importance of the CBLDF to their work.

Friend kicked off the conversation by openly declaring what made him "fall in love with comics" in the first place—"that Marvel Treasury edition of *Star Wars*. It was the biggest comic book ever!" Sinclair's love of the medium also began in childhood, buying comics at the newsstand and tracing Neal Adams' *Batman* artwork. "And then Frank Miller's *The Dark Knight Returns* came out, and I began to think 'that would be a cool job to have . . . '"

Lobdell came to comics later in life. "When I was seventeen," remembers Lobdell, "I was in the hospital for a month and everyone bought me comic books to read. And I think because I started reading comics when I was older, my first reaction was 'wow, someone does this for a living!'" It was a friend of Friend who first showed him an issue of *Spawn*. "I was totally blown away. I couldn't believe comics had become so advanced. I fell head over heels in love with comics again in two weeks."

RICHARD FRIEND, ALEX SINCLAIR, LOBDELL AND CHAREST

"When you're a kid," said Charest, "there's something so visceral about looking at a comic; it's easy to get sucked in, to see yourself in the book. Your imagination takes over and you really care about the story and the characters."

That involvement on the audience's part strikes a chord with Lobdell. "I know a lot of artists and writers who legitimately care about what their readers think. They're out there trying to please the fans, and they care about the characters and try not to insult people. You know, you don't see that in a lot of other industries."

"The thing about comics," said Charest, "is, well, for me, it's super-time consuming and very labor-intensive. But it's the closest I can get to directing a movie without all that money. I can tell a story and actually show the reader exactly what I want them to see. You get to read a short story, and you get thirty or forty little drawings to look at at the same time. Where else can you get that? Another thing that's really cool about comics is the collaborative thing, working with different people on new projects. If I were a painter, or something else, I couldn't do that. And the exposure to other artists is important—we kind of feed off each other."

Charest went on to offer up the "real truth" about the re-launch of *Wildcats*. "I was sitting in my office, and I realized I wasn't making any money." Charest was in great demand as a cover artist, but the amount of time he spent lavishing details and super-fine linework on each piece meant that he was "making like $5.50 an hour! And I was working intensely hard. So I walked into [WildStorm editor-in-chief] Scott Dunbier's office and said, 'I have to do *Wildcats* again. I need a steady gig, or else I can't eat.' And that's how it happened!"

"Well, there's more too it than that," Lobdell added quickly. "The series needed a turn-around. We realized that we had to junk some of what had happened and start almost from scratch—go back to the first year and start there. In a way, you tell a story and then it's done. The first group of *Wildcats* stories, issues one to fifty, that's one story, and now we're doing the next. Do Travis and I want to work on the book for fifty issues? Yeah. I think it'd be fun if we could do that."

"Basically," interrupted Charest, "we're telling new stories that we want to tell, we're just using the Wildcats as a tool to tell them . . . " Both Lobdell and Charest were obviously excited at the prospect of their new series, interrupting each other and completing each other's sentences. "And we're looking at the characters and finding what it is about them that facilitates certain stories. It's the stories we want to tell, rather than focusing on the team. There's more of a feeling of a story as whole, rather than . . . "

". . . these are 'The Adventures of the Wildcats,' and they all show up and pose. They used to do a lot of posing. They're not going to pose anymore," promised Lobdell. "I think one of the things that Travis brings to the work is a great sense of realism. This new series will have a very realistic world with a few specific larger-than-life elements. These stories are really about how these characters interact with the real world around them. The adventures now are going to be very covert. If we have our way, they might never call themselves the Wildcats. It's a story of a group of people who all have similar life experiences and have decided to work together. I think that's what people want to see—characters and stories they can relate to."

As the hour grew later, the conversation turned to the Comic Book Legal Defense Fund and issues of censorship in comics. Charest brought up the issue of *Wildcats/X-Men* on which he and Lobdell had worked together. Although set during WWII, there was a dispute about the use of swastikas in advertisements for the book. Charest removed them, and admitted there were other elements in the book that he was told were 'too graphic.' "I've never tried to be graphic just for the sake of it, but sometimes it's more effective to draw a picture than to have the dialogue say 'oh, I've just been shot in the temple.' So there is a level on which censorship works against the storytelling. It's not like I've ever been harassed. I've never been subpoenaed or arrested like Mike Diana or anything."

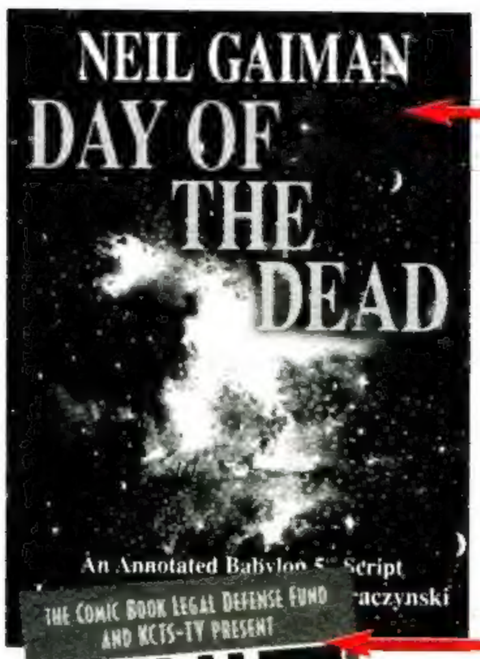
"At the same time, you do censor yourself," added Lobdell. "I'd never write a *Hitman*-type script for an issue of *Generation X*. It's really just a matter of sensitivity. This is my expression, true, but you have a particular audience in mind. There's no reason to go down to the lowest common denominator with violence and swearing. I think it's preferable to tell a story without that. At the same time, if you need to use it, if you're telling a different kind of story for a different audience, you shouldn't be prevented from using it."

"It's a problem that faces the First Amendment," he continued. "You see these lunatics on a street corner shouting 'this group is evil,' and your first instinct is you want them to shut up. But you realize that when you start to censor at any level, when do you stop? We live in a country where books that we read nowadays in school were once burned—where can you draw the line? And I think it's great that there are people and an organization like the CBLDF that takes the importance of the First Amendment, and the importance of comics, so much to heart that they're defending creators and retailers on this level, in the courts. If they start censoring comic books, before you know it, they're going to start censoring thought."

"Yeah," agreed Charest. "I've never had any need of the Fund personally, but I definitely think that it's necessary for the industry. And because I'm so cheap, I haven't donated dime one to the Fund, the least I can do now is do something. Use any kind of talent I might have at this job to somehow contribute."

"I've never had to do anything for the fight," added Sinclair. "When Rachelle asked me to do the signing for the Comic Book Legal Defense Fund, and to be at the CBLDF booth at the convention, I thought it was great that I'd be able to help out. You never know when you're going to need it."

True to their words, the entire team came out in support of the Fund on Saturday, the most crowded and crazy day of the San Diego ComiCon. Their marathon four-hour signing raised more than $4,000, helping make San Diego '98 the CBLDF's most successful convention ever. For all the details, check out the convention report on page 4 or our web-site at **www.cbldf.org**. *Wildcats* #1 debuted in January from WildStorm/DC Comics. For more information about *Wildcats* and other WildStorm books, visit them on-line at **www.wildstorm.com**.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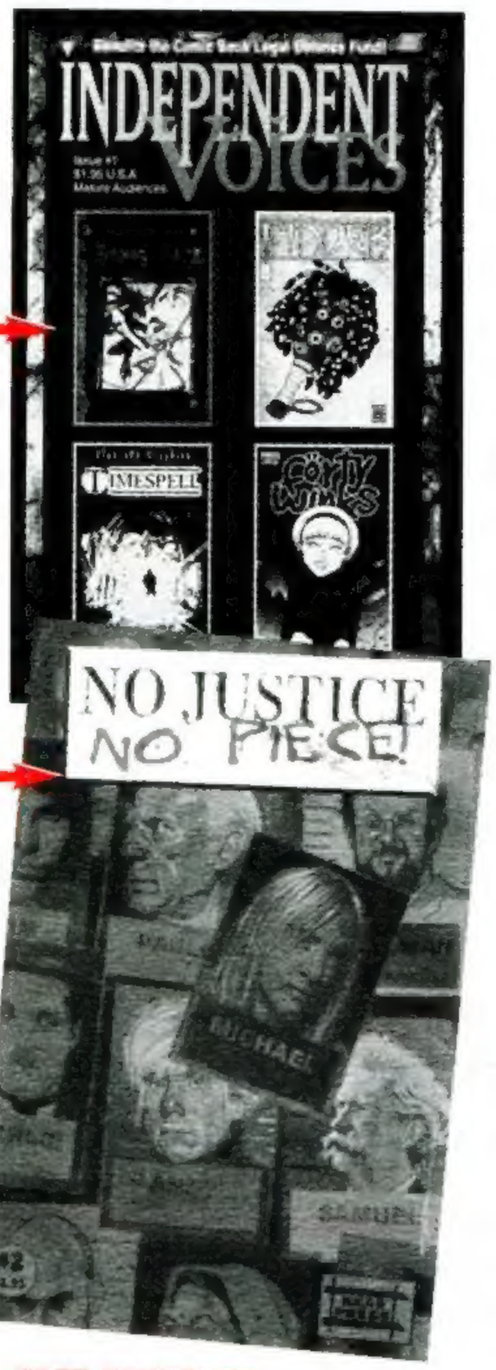

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